

Cooperating for Solutions

The Southwest Region Collaborates with The University of Pennsylvania

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The Southwest Region of the National Park Service is responsible for preserving some of the most unique and varied cultural resources in the system. A broad scope of history is reflected in pre-Columbian sites, Spanish Colonial, settlement/westward expansion, and finally 20th-century American development. We are very proud of these resources and recognize that this diversity demands both a vigilant and flexible approach to managing preservation strategies.

Often in cultural resource preservation, site-specific adapted solutions are required of generalized approaches. We are accomplishing this by realizing that we need regional solutions to regional problems which will be focused to a unique park problem and that we can not do it alone. We must find partners whose expertise and resources can join in a common effort to apply the best conservation approaches and methods to achieve our mandated goal of passing the resources on **unimpaired**. The cooperative agreement I signed with the University of Pennsylvania in 1992 is rewarding us with challenging and positive consequences. The results of specific sub-agreements assist us in developing a continuing preservation ethic based on responding to prioritized needs, sound research, condition assessments, testing solutions, applications in the field, training in and out of the Service, and recommending future programs. Products are site specific, but methods translate across the board.

Following the guidelines of the Cultural Resources Preservation Program, superintendents from four of our parks (Aztec Ruins National Monument, NM; Fort Union National Monument, NM; Fort Davis National Historic Site, TX; and Bandelier National Monument, NM) sent in development/study package proposals in the late 1980s that identified major deficiencies in the preservation of plasters on walls. These proposals were representative of our wide diversity—prehistoric mud plaster on stone, historic mud on stone, and lime plaster on adobe. Naturally, some common threads linked the proposals. The Southwest Region's Division of Conservation grouped together the four parks to strengthen the argument for funding by offering to share approaches and solutions; and, in 1990, a three-year program was kicked off.

Coincidentally, in 1990, the Sixth International Conference on the Conservation of Earthen Architecture (Adobe 90) was held in New Mexico; and, naturally, the Southwest Region played a large role in the conference. It was there that members of my staff interacted with others who were searching for solutions to the same prob-

lems. We realized we had an opportunity to collaborate; and with a singular vision held, the necessary steps were taken to put a program in place.

Step-by-step methodical work resulted in the completion of plaster stabilization and backfilling of Anasazi walls at Aztec Ruins over the three-year period. Collaboration with architectural conservators was necessary to achieve a comprehensive program supplementing our skills in ruins preservation. We readily recognize our deficiencies in dealing with some of the more esoteric aspects of conservation and rightly seek those skills where necessary.

Dealing with 1930s mud plasters on stone at Bandelier has proved more problematical from a maintenance and compliance view. Pilot tests have been accomplished, and further test walls will be required to complete the study so that a consultation process with the State Historic Preservation Officer can resolve the direction of treatment. Only then can a replastering preservation program be launched.

In 1992, we embarked on an ambitious program, using the new cooperative agreement with the University of Pennsylvania to achieve real solutions to some of the very troubling and difficult plaster preservation issues at Fort Union and Fort Davis where similarities are most profound. Our staff had worked on documentation, assessment, and some limited stabilization efforts in 1990 and 1991. Again, looking to others to supplement where we are weak was the order of the day, and the cooperative agreement became the vehicle.

In the course of the three-year cultural resources program, we have recognized that the needs extend way beyond the scope of a three-year cycle and that a much larger and more expanded program will be required to address all the wall plaster problems at these parks and other parks where the problem goes largely unidentified. (Canyon de Chelly, AZ, has been at work identifying and mapping their plasters with an eye to conservation eventually.) Thus, we extended the three-year program for two additional years as a bridging tool. A program continued in 1993 and, hopefully, can be funded in 1994. These can be no more than pilots as funding levels are stretched to a minimum, but they have and do set us on the course to real solutions.

Thus far, the results of our cooperative agreement are a win/win. NPS personnel and graduate students receive training in conservation techniques, research work is accomplished at the University of Pennsylvania that could never be approached under current restraints, pilot treatment programs are defined and applied by students who volunteer, and creative solutions are mutually developed in collaboration between the NPS and the university that become available to the public at large. The groundwork is laid, measured progress achieved, and a direction for the future set.

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Editor's Note: In a future issue of CRM we will include project summaries for the model sites included in the cooperative agreement with the University of Pennsylvania, which offered a methodology for the documentation, stabilization, and interpretation of architectural plasters at earthen ruins.